

## **All about the Budget**

Mayor Joe Curtatone

Last week it seemed like three-quarters of my schedule was consumed by various kinds of budget meetings and events.

On Monday, I took part in a State House rally sponsored by the Stop the Cuts Coalition, a group of labor, human service and progressive advocacy groups that are pressuring the legislature to restore funding to crucial services at the state and local level. At the time, the House's proposed FY2010 budget called for devastating cuts in a number of key areas that affect the lives of every Massachusetts resident – including aid to cities and towns. My message to the group was simple: we know that some cuts are unavoidable, but that new revenue sources are also needed. Personally, I am still strongly in favor of the targeted revenue proposals made earlier this year by Governor Patrick, including the closure of the telecommunications property tax loophole and the creation of local option hotel and meals tax to provide some diversity in revenue sources and ease the burden on residential property taxpayers.

But I also told the group that, if the legislature decided to adjust the sales tax in order to restore local aid, then my response – and the response of mayors across the Commonwealth – would be a heartfelt “Thank you.”

So here is that “thank you:” to Speaker DeLeo for his leadership, and to Representatives Provost, Sciortino and Toomey for a courageous vote in tough circumstances. Somerville and other communities still face hard choices in FY2010, but the legislature's action means fewer cuts to core services and programs. (And thanks also to Rebekah Gewirtz and Harris Gruman for including me in the rally.)

The very next evening, I provided a briefing on the current fiscal situation and our planning process at a public forum on the budget. Held by the Board of Aldermen's Finance Committee in conjunction with the School Committee, the forum was a valuable table-setter for the coming budget process, and served as one of several ways for the public to get more information about, and provide input on, city budget issues and priorities in the current fiscal crisis.

And last Wednesday, I met in Holyoke with my fellow mayors and other local officials to discuss – you guessed it – state budget policy at the Mass Municipal Association's monthly session. My message there was that we have to keep fighting for the full range of revenue changes called for by Governor Patrick, and that we should push the legislature for renewed attention to cost-saving pension and transportation reforms at the state level. How can we convince the public more revenue if the Commonwealth doesn't begin by making structural reforms that will save money and make government more accountable?

Here in Somerville, you can bet that we will start with cuts and savings before we look for enhanced revenue.